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AUTHOR Stewart, Debra W.
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the local Commissions on the Status of Women (CSW) groups, whose primary task is to shape a women's agenda for the participation in politics at the community level. CSW's now exist in 150 communities across the United States as official advisory boards to general jurisdiction governments. Five questions are explored in this paper: (1) What is gained by viewing the CSW as an agenda building institution?; (2) What is the nature of the policy agenda such institutions promote?; (3) How and why do Commissions vary in agenda building capacity?; (4) Are there issues which Commissions systematically screen out?; and (5) Do CSW's initiate issues not existing on a systematic community agenda? In-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of 48 CSW's. Findings reveal that Commissions generally stress a few issues with broad appeal and that they tend to adopt clusters of less generally attractive issues. In some instances Commissions do not simply respond to issues on the systematic agenda of the local community, but will act as a local initiator to actually build a systematic agenda by placing items on the CSW agenda. (Author/RM)

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INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF FEMALE PARTICIPATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: COMMISSIONS ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND AGENDA BUILDING

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Debra W. Stewart
North Carolina State University

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> "He who determines what politics is about runs the country, because the definition of alternatives is the choice of conflicts, and the choice of conflicts allocates power."[1]

Few would dispute the truth of Schattschneider's characterization of American politics. Most would agree that for much of American political history politics has not been about women's policy concerns. When considered in tandem these observations present a compelling rationale for studying the participation of women in politics from an agenda-setting perspective.

The virtue of agenda-setting as a conceptual lens emerges clearly in the case of female political participation at the local level. Though policy of vital concern to women is resolved by public and private community institutions, the lion's share of scholarly attention is directed toward women's participation at the mass level or toward elite female involvement in the more removed state and national arenas.[2] That elite research which does focus on women as local officeholders suggests that when in these roles women do not see themselves as advocates of a women's agenda.[3] Historically, the major vehicle for nonpartisan female political activism in communities, the League of Women Voters, has shunned anything resembling a women's agenda.[4]

The one institution that in recent years has embraced the task of shaping a women's agenda at the community level is the local Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Existing now in 150 communities across the United States as official advisory boards to general jurisdiction governments, CSW are designed to facilitate the building of a women's issue agenda in their respective communities.

While focusing on the CSW as the primary unit of analysis, this paper explores five questions: (1) what is gained by viewing the CSW as an agenda-building institution? (2) what is the nature of the policy agenda such institutions promote? (3) how and why do commissions vary in agenda-building capacity? (4) are there issues commissions systematically screen out? and (5) do CSW initiate issues not existing on a systemic community agenda? Elaboration of the agenda-building concept provides the groundwork for full examination of these questions.

THE CONCEPT OF AGENDA-BUILDING

The specificity with which agenda-building is defined varies greatly in the literature. In its most inclusive form, the study of agenda-building is defined by Hoppe as "... the analysis of how problems developed, how they were defined, the courses of action formulated to act on those problems, the legitimation of one course of action over another, the emergence of policy systems designed to act on such problems on a continuing basis."[5] Clearly, agenda-building so conceived is simply everything that politics is about. On the other hand, in its most restricted and specific form, agenda-building means simply directing the attention of political decision-makers to specific issues. As Cobb and Elder develop this definition, the restricted nature of the range of issues any polity can consider assumes central importance.[6] The restriction arises from two sources. "The first is a systems imperative and is predicated on the fact that the processing and attention capabilities of any human organization are necessarily limited. The second source of restriction arises from the fact that 'all

forms of political organization have a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilization of bias.'"[7] Findings of both Crenson and Walker buttress this perspective on the impact of agenda-setting. Crenson argues that, "a community that commits itself to the consideration of one local concern may, in effect, commit itself to a whole chain of rationally related issues and diminish its ability to consider rationally antagonistic issues."[8] Walker concurs that focus on a particular issue impacts on future alliances that are likely to be formed.[9]

Thus attention of decision-makers is not the only aspect of agenda-building worthy of consideration. The kinds of alliances in existence also bear on agenda-building activities. As Cobb and Elder note, if the initial state of affairs in a conflict were determinate, most issues would never gain placement on a governmental agenda, for the strongest side would always succeed in restricting access and in maintaining the status quo.[10] But in order to get an issue on the policy agenda, one side or the other must broaden its support by altering existing cleavage lines. Schattschneider talks about this process as "redefinition."[11]

Thus the key questions of agenda-building, when viewed from the perspective of the newly mobilized interests, are these. How does one gain access to the political agenda and who participates in this process? Once interests in the community at large have defined certain matters as salient, how do those "matters" translate into "issues" on the political agenda? Cobb and Elder frame this question in terms of the gap between the systemic agenda, i.e., "a general set of political controversies that will be viewed at any point in time as falling within a range of legitimate concerns meriting the attention of the polity," and the institutional agenda, i.e., "a set of concrete, specific items scheduled for active and serious consideration by a particular institutional decision-making body."[12]

COMMISSIONS AS AGENDA-BUILDERS

Viewing Commissions on the Status of Women as agenda-building institutions provides a conceptual framework within which their activities can be described and assessed. They are institutions conceived in order to introduce a new bias into the local political system in which they operate. As institutions, they are premised on the conviction that any policy system in which government plays a totally passive role in agenda-setting implicitly favors the existing distribution of resources, including access points. CSW reflect a general movement, evident at the local level in the late 1960's and through the 1970's, for local government to establish institutions for the explicit purpose of aiding groups in articulating their problems.[13]

In Cobb and Elder's terminology Commissions on the Status of Women can be seen as institutions which bridge the gap between the systemic women's agenda in the community and the institutional agenda. Commissions are thus issue brokers, of a kind, which endeavor to place new problems relating to women on the formal docket of the local decision-making bodies.[14] Viewing CSW as agenda-building institutions gives a narrowed and sharpened focus to the analysis of this effort to institutionalize female participation at the local level. The

institutional raison d'etre becomes to enlighten policy-making officials on women's policy issues and to force at least a recognition of the problems issues represent.[15] Agenda-building as a conceptual framework makes no assumption about the outcome of local governmental action on issues placed by the CSW on the formal agenda.

Some will undoubtedly argue with what may appear to be a nonresult model for framing discussion of Commissions on the Status of Women. Yet it is appropriate in this case because the very possibility of gaining the docket remains problematic for many women's issues. The likely source of this uncertain future for many issues is that the formal agenda is, "restricted by prevailing popular sentiment as to what constitutes appropriate matters for governmental action."[16] Historically the private or domestic domain has been off-limits to local government. Still issues most intimately impinging on a woman's life chances emanate from this domain--spouse abuse, child care, abortion, to mention but a few.[17] As citizen advisory boards, ostensibly selected to insure broad representation and a balanced view of community women's interests, [18] CSW have potential to confer legitimacy on issues. Such legitimacy is a prerequisite for formal agenda status. Given the ostensibly private character of many issues we view as women's policy issues, working with the agenda-building concept affords the opportunity to examine the activities of Commissions on the Status of Women in what may be one of the most important roles any womens organization can play in community politics.

If agenda-building is a conceptual focus worth adopting, and if Commissions on the Status of Women are the principal institutions established to carry out the agenda-building process, multiple dimensions of agenda-building activity of Commissions merit examination. The data base supporting this examination will now be elaborated.

DATA BASE

Commissions on the Status of Women, the primary unit of analysis, were studied at both the macro- and the micro-levels. The data on agenda-building were collected as part of a larger study investigating multiple aspects of CSW performance.

The macro-perspective on the nature of local CSW agenda was drawn from a survey of local governmental Commissions on the Status of Women. Issue-involvement data was coded directly from questionnaires, sent by the Women's Bureau (U.S. Department of Labor) to all Commissions operating during the summer of 1975, asking them to list the major issues with which they were concerned. Officially there were 75 local Commissions at that time.[19] About 60 of these maintained some level of activity; 48 of these functioning Commissions returned the questionnaire. In order to gain insight into sources of agenda variation, additional information on the political and demographic setting of each responding commission was drawn from The City-County Data Book: 1972, The State and Local Governmental Special Studies: U.S. Census Bureau, and The Municipal Yearbook, 1973.

At the micro-level five commissions received intensive study. These five were selected because they were viewed as effective or successful Commissions by a panel of seven women, all of whom have held positions in organizations

where they have been directly concerned with the establishment and promotion of local Commissions on the Status of Women. Each member of the panel was asked in a telephone interview a series of questions designed to elicit, first, her impressions of the meaning of effectiveness when applied to Commissions on the Status of Women, and second, her nomination of Commissions placing in the top five or six according to this definition. While there was some variation in those Commission attributes named as signifying success, there was surprising consensus on which Commissions fell into the most Successful/Effective category. Near consensus existed on six Commissions as constituting this group: one of these was dropped from analysis because of its unique governmental setting.

In-depth interviews were conducted with Commission leadership and with women's organizational activist leadership in the communities. The Commission or institutional agenda was operationalized in a straightforward fashion using mean responses of Commission leadership (executive officers, staff, chairpersons of active task forces or committees) to a question requiring the assignment of importance scores to twenty women's policy issues. (See Appendix A.) The systemic agenda was ascertained by mean responses of the major women's activist organization leaders in each community. Using the League of Women Voters and either the National Organization for Women or the Women's Political Caucus as constants across the communities, a reputational method was employed to construct a more complete list of four or five major women's organizations in each community. (See Appendix B for more complete discussion of selection procedures.) A number of open-ended questions included on the interview schedule as well as a careful review of Commission documents and records, and local newspapers over the preceding year provided additional insight into the agenda-building phenomenon.

THE NATURE OF CSW ISSUE AGENDA ACROSS COMMUNITIES: A MACRO-PERSPECTIVE

Understanding the shape of the issue agenda presented by CSW requires first attention to the dynamics of issue expansion. As Cobb and Elder put it, "The underlying proposition is that the greater the size of the audience to which an issue can be enlarged, the greater the likelihood that it will attain systemic agenda standing and thus acceptance to a formal agenda."[20] More specifically they note, "issues are likely to be expanded to a larger public if they can be defined broadly to appeal to more subgroups within the populace."[21]

Assuming that Commissions on the Status of Women are responding to a systemic agenda in playing this broker role, we would expect issue placement to occur in the following form. First, issues should appear on CSW agendas with varying frequency with those issues having the broadest subgroup appeal gaining placement most often. Second, issues reflecting a narrow appeal should cluster together in sets that invite support from a variety of subgroups. Issue clusters might reflect inherently similar problems, or they might suggest a set of conditions jointly produced by a single factor or set of factors in the context within which the Commissions adopting these clusters operate. In this section we will explore these expectations derived from agenda-building theory by, first, presenting a rank ordering of CSW agenda items by frequency of occurrence. second, presenting a display of the issue clusters, and third, discussing those clusters in light of the alternative bases for their common

agenda placement. Table I presents a rank ordering of issues according to frequency of agenda placement based on the 1975 survey of all local Commissions on the Status of Women.

Table I

Issues on Local CSW Agenda by Rank Order and Frequency

Rank	Issue	Frequency
1	Employment	24
2	Education	24
3	Rape	14
4	Child Care	13
5	Affirmative Action	12
6	ERA	11
7	Credit	10
8	Legislation State/Federal	9
9	Health	6
10	Women's rights in families	5
11	Sexism in schools	4
11	Reproduction/Population	3
11	Female Offenders	3
12	Media	3
12	Insurance	2
12	Aging	2
12	Economic Status	2
12	Abortion	2
12	Housing	2
12	Miscellaneous Non-Women's issues	2
12	Abused women	2
13	Child support	1

Clearly, issues do appear on CSW agenda with varying degrees of frequency. Education and employment occur on the agenda of the Commissions surveyed nearly twice as often as the next most frequently named issues. Both education and employment are goods which most people have to come to expect as a matter of course in modern society, and equal opportunity in these areas may simply be a value with which few would disagree.[22] Most of the issues falling in the lower third of the ranking tend to be directed toward meeting needs of specific subgroups: older women, abused women, low-income women, etc. Accordingly the ease of issue expansion factor, highlighted by the agenda-building theory, proves useful in interpreting the skewed distribution of issues this sample of CSW espoused.

As Table I reveals, most issues do not occur with the frequency of education and employment. How do these other issues gain the docket? Agenda theory would suggest that issues might appear in clusters of some kind. Table II presents the results of a factor analysis revealing the propensity of CWS to adopt clusters of issues. Factor analysis is especially useful in this context for it isolates interdependencies among issues and attempts to express the common dimensions

underlying the issues in terms of a smaller number of factors. The figures presented in Table II, e.g. Economic Status (.90), are factor loadings and are measures of the degree to which each issue correlates with the underlying factor. Through examining the correlations of the factors with the issues it is possible to describe the dimension measured by each factor. In other words by considering both the issues which "load" on each factor and the strength of these relationships it is possible to "name" the dimensions extracted from the 21 issues in this factor analysis. The nine factors are listed, in the order in which they were extracted, in Table II.

Table II

Issue Clusters*

I. Economic Survival
   1) Economic Status (.90)
   2) Child Support (.89)
   3) Abortion Access (.90)

II. Youth
   1) Sexism in Schools (.74)
   2) Reproduction/Birth Control (.87)

III. Governmental Programs
   1) Education (.67)
   2) Health (.84)
   3) State and Federal Legislation (.54)

IV. Female Independence
   1) Women's Rights in Families (.85)
   2) Insurance (.81)

V. Pure Women's Rights
   1) ERA (.89)
   2) Employment (-.63)

VI. Non-Women Specific
   1) Housing (.69)
   2) Miscellaneous (.89)

VII. Protection and Care
   1) Child care (.56)
   2) Rape (.61)
   3) Aging (.64)
   4) Media (.69)
   5) Abused Women (.62)

VIII. Absence of Concern with the Credit Issue (-.90)

IX. Absence of Response to Federal Initiative
   1) Affirmative Action (-.62)
   2) Status of Female Offenders (-.79)

*All twenty-one issues have a loading on each factor, but only the issues with the highest loadings are used in identifying a factor. A factor loading of .50 or greater was chosen as the cut off point for inclusion of an issue in a factor. An orthogonal rotation, varimax, was used to extract the factors from the correlation matrix. For a factor to be included in Table 2, it had to have an eigenvalue of 1 (this statistic measures the amount of variance explained by a single factor). The total variance in the unaltered correlation matrix explained by the 9 factors is 79%. The statistical program used was, Anthony S. Barr, et. al., Statistical Analysis System (Raleigh, N.C. : SAS Institute, Inc., 1976), 112-119.

The data suggest that Commissions do adopt clusters of issues, a finding generally consistent with the expectation from agenda-building theory that issues must appeal to broad publics. Coalitions of subgroups constitute a sufficiently broad public to gain formal agenda status for their collective interest. The broader question about the structure of issue clusters: Do clusters contain issues relating to the same substantive problem, or are they different problems that share similar causes?, cannot be answered conclusively through analysis of this 1975 data. Still, in an exploratory research vein, the clusterings support some rich and potentially fruitful speculation.

As noted above, issues may be placed together on a CSW agenda because they deal with the same underlying problem that various subgroups might experience in different forms. On the other hand, a cluster may be characterized by a mix of issues dealing with different types of problems, but possibly reflecting a single set of conditions in the environment within which the agendas are set. This analysis permits speculation in both directions. Factors I, III, IV, V, VII, and VIII lend themselves to the first rationale for issue clusters. The issues composing these factors consist of common substantive themes. Factor I, economic status of low-income women, child support, and abortion (in 1975, after the 1973 Supreme Court decision), deal with the problem of economic survival for women living in poverty or near-poverty. These issues do not name programs or policies, but rather suggest needs. Jointly, they may be classified as survival issues for poor women. In Factor III, the issues relate to programmatic activities of the government. Factor IV, including a general concern for women's rights and the family, and the need for improved insurance programs for women, suggests a shared substantive theme relating to the importance of female independence. Factor V embodies a pure concern with the principle of women's rights, independent of the material payoff in terms of employment opportunity that the ERA will bring. The common substantive theme shared by the collection of issues in Factor VII (with the possible exception of the media) is the need to secure protection for people who are in a vulnerable or powerless situation. Factor VIII, representing only the absence of concern with credit, obviously embodies that sole substantive theme. In three of the factors, II, VI, IX, a single thread is less readily apparent, though even here some common substantive themes may be worth pursuing in future research. Factor II may reflect a common concern with the needs and problems of young women. Factor VI may reflect a stress by a CSW on issues not relating directly to women. Factor IX may suggest a common unwillingness to respond to issues stimulated by the federal initiative, reflected in both affirmative action programs and programs for female offenders. The alternative mode of examining issue clusters hypothesizes that the basis of a clustering of issues resides in elements of the political, socio-economic, or organizational context within which these issues gain docket status. Table III lists a set of variables, drawn from the community politics literature, that might impact on the likelihood of a Commission's placing a cluster of issues on its agenda. Significant correlations of these variables with factor scores for commissions simply suggests hypotheses for future research.

Table III. Issue Clusters Correlated[1] With Political, Socio-Economic and Organizational Traits of the CSW Agenda Setting Context[2,3]

		Issue Clusters								
	Source of Variation	Factor 1 Economic Survival .... Economic Status/Child Support/ Abortion	Factor 2 (Youth) .... Sexism in Schools/ Reproduction-Population	Factor 3 Government Programs .... Education/ Health/ Legislation: State-Federal	Factor 4 Female Independence .... Women's Rights in Families/ Insurance	Factor 5 Pure Women's Rights .... Employment/ ERA	Factor 6 (Non-Women Specific) .... Housing/ Miscellaneous	Factor 7 Protection and Care .... Aging/Child Care/Rape/ Media/Welfare	Factor 8 Absence of Concern With Credit Issue .... Credit	Factor 9 (Absence of Response to Federal Initiative, ... Affirmative Action/Female Offenders
Political Traits:	Political Culture	-.30*	-.04	-.26	.16	-.01	.003	-.00*	.10	.00
	Reform (% Non-Partisan)[c]	.11	-.14	.11	-.05	-.04	.36*	.32*	.00	-.20
	Form of Election[b]	.14	-.07	.02	-.15	.25	-.17	-.26	-.13	.08
	Jurisdiction	-.12	.07	.23*	-.10	.18	-.21	-.16	-.11	.10
	Manager Government[c]	.13	.14	.33*	.00	-.06	.25	-.11	-.08	-.09
Socio-Economic Traits:	% Unemployed in Civilian Labor Force[a]	-.03	.31*	.19	-.07	.25	-.01	-.05	.02	.10
	% Foreign Population[a]	-.07	.02	-.15	-.03	-.36*	.23	-.34*	.09	.32*
	% Non-White[a]	.07	.27	-.10	-.38*	-.31*	-.13	-.13	.12	-.15
	% Female Head of Household[a]	.25	.22	-.07	-.42*	-.23	-.14	-.21	.06	.18
	% Families Below Poverty Level[a]	.16	.26	.27	-.15	-.43*	.05	.01	-.06	-.03
	Size of Community[a]	-.35*	.05	-.41*	-.30*	-.28	.11	-.28*	-.05	-.13
Internal Organizational Traits:	Size of Membership	-.09	.08	.05	.05	-.22	.00	.36*	.12	.12
	Location in Government	.05	.29*	-.23	.27	.01	.04	.07	-.18	-.05
	Executive Director	.16	-.01	.44*	.16	-.04	.48*	.14	.04	.11
	Tenure	-.07	-.10	.11	-.17	.20	.17	-.15	.26	-.02
	Advocacy	.25*	.21	-.01	-.05	.24	.01	.30*	-.14	-.06
	Minority Membership	-.08	.11	-.02	-.25	-.03	.17	-.04	-.10	.03
	Employed Membership	-.13	.04	.31*	-.06	-.29	.03	-.21	-.12	.05
	Youth Membership	-.03	-.42*	-.06	-.04	.19	-.33*	.08	-.18	-.22
	Male Membership	.06	.00	-.06	-.03	.06	-.03	.13	-.03	-.26

[1]Pearson's r significant at .08 level marked by *. Spearman's rank order correlation (rho) used for Political Culture and Location in Government.

[2]Sources: (a) City-County Data Book, 1972,
(b) State and Local Government, Special Studies #68, Table 5, U.S. Bureau of Census,
(c) Municipal Year Book, 1973,

[3]Supporting literature and operational measures (when not apparent): (1) Political Culture (commission communities are coded on a 1 to 6 scale with 1=moralistic, 2=predominantly moralistic, 3=somewhat moralistic, 4=individualistic, 5=predominantly or somewhat individualistic, and 6=traditional), see Daniel Elazar, American Federalism: A View From the States (2d ed.; New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1972), pp. 106-107; (2) Reform (percentage non-partisan), see Michael Aiken and Robert R. Alford, "Community Structure and Innovation: The Case of Urban Renewal," American Sociological Review, XXXV (August, 1970), pp. 650-665; (3) Form of Election (percentage exclusively at large), see Aiken and Alford, "...The Case of Urban Renewal," pp. 650-665; (4) Jurisdiction (percentage city); (5) Manager Form of Government; Socio-Economic Traits, for a review of this literature see Richard I. Hofferbert, "State and Community Policy Studies. A Review of Comparative Input-Output Analysis," in James A. Robinson (ed.) 3rd Political Science Annual (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972); Organizational Traits, for a review of this literature see, James Q. Wilson, Political Organizations (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 195-260.

Discussion will focus on Factors II, VI, and IX, those factors resisting easy interpretation in terms of their central substantive themes.

The clustering in Factor II, correlated as it is with the level of local unemployment, may reflect a concern in the broader community about the condition of youth. The significance of this youth problem may be magnified for the Commission on the Status of Women because Commissions high on this factor tend to be located in Human Relations Commissions which are typically charged with concern for a variety of disadvantaged groups in a community. It is interesting to note that the proportion of youth membership on the Commissions appears negatively correlated with this factor, lending credence to the interpretation that the problems are not inherently similar, but rather that they reflect a broader contextual condition. The positive correlation between Factor VI and the existence of an executive director on the one hand, and a nonpartisan electoral system on the other, suggests another potentially significant set of contextual conditions. A nonpartisan electoral system, with its deemphasis on responding to organized interests in the community, may foster CSW adoption of agenda-building strategies that include placing issues not specific to women on the institutional docket. This may be a particularly conscious strategy where the Commission employs an executive director who, from her broader perspective, perceives the value such tangential issues may have in terms of securing support for pure women's issues within the context of the reformed political system. On Factor IX there are no significant relationships between the absence of support for these two issues and any of the context variables listed in Table III. Thus the substantive interpretation, that these issues reflect an absence of positive response to federal initiative, remains the only apparent interpretation for the cluster.

Discussion thus far is simply suggestive of the ways in which we may continue to look at the basis for the clustering of issues that occurs on local CSW agenda. Obviously, future work in this area would need to probe hypotheses gleaned from this exploratory work. But whatever the basis of issue clustering may be, the rationale, from an agenda building perspective, for putting issues together remains constant. The clustering phenomenon suggests that CSW do carry specific groups of issues on their agenda and that all issues are not equally compatible even within the narrow area of women's policy concerns. This finding lends credence to the assertion of agenda-building theorists that, by focusing attention on one issue you indirectly influence the kinds of alliances that are formed[23] and thus the kinds of other issues that can receive simultaneous agenda status.

A MICRO-PERSPECTIVE: VARIATION IN AGENDA-BUILDING CAPACITY

Thus far we have focused on the nature of the issue agenda communities present. Now, turning to a more evaluative area of concern, we ask, "If Commissions all designated as successful vary in agenda-building capacity, what factors seemed associated with that variation?" Commentators on the agenda-building literature generally bemoan the fact that both the systemic and institutional agenda concepts resist easy operationalization.[24] But within this narrowly focused domain of the community-level women's agenda the comparative case study method yielding five community CSW studies provides rich insight

into how and why, from the perspective of the actors involved, the systemic and institutional agenda both converge and vary. First, we will look at that variation which does exist in an agenda-building capacity. Then, we consider some potential sources for variation. Next, we examine those issues appearing to resist agenda placement across the board. Finally, we focus on agenda initiation activity of Commissions. Throughout the discussion, fictitious names are used in order to protect the anonymity of the Commissions and interviewees involved.

VARIATION IN AGENDA-BUILDING CAPACITY

Comparing activist interviews across communities one is struck by the variation in the extent to which community activists articulate an agenda compatible with that of the CSW. Table IV reports in a quantitative form the relationship between the commission and activist issue agenda in the five communities.

Table IV

Degree of Relationship Between Rank Ordering on Issue Agenda*: CSW and Activist

Community	Spearman Correlation Coefficient
Altona	.72
Onega	.67
St. George County	.64
Marysville County	.47
Dodge County	.18

* n = 20 issues

Clearly these correlations suggest significant differences, borne out by the interviews, in the extent to which Commissions perform this agenda building role. Looking simply at the degree of relationship between the activist and Commission agenda in the communities, Altona appears substantially more effective than Dodge County in performing a conversion role, i.e., converting issues from the women's activist, or systemic agenda, to the Commission or institutional agenda.

High performing Commissions report two general modes of agenda building, one simply responsive and the other involving initiating rather than responding. One Commission member described by illustration the responsive mode of agenda building:

> "Two women come to you [the commission] and they say, 'We want to start a women's credit union.' It may not be at the top of your priorities. It may not even be within your whole needs assessment. But if they say, 'We want to do this,' and we think there is a need, we are certainly going to do everything we can do to help them."

Help in this case was in fact limited to providing a list of organizations which these women should contact and permission to say that the CSW strongly encouraged the idea of a credit union.

Other activities illustrate the Commissions' initiating role in agenda building. In one Commission a few members were very interested in the health area, particularly the restricted access to abortion resulting from the location of the vacuum aspirator in the surgery department of the local public hospital. The Commission chairperson called a meeting of representatives from each of the social service agencies involved in pregnancy counselling, ranging from Planned Parenthood to the neighborhood health clinics. After trying to ascertain how many abortions had to be referred out of the city, the Commission chairperson and a chair of the health committee, accompanied by a city council woman and a representative from the mayor's office, visited the hospital administrator to argue for change. Ultimately the vacuum aspirator was placed in the outpatient clinic. Here the CSW not only placed an agenda item, high in salience to the activist community, on the institutional agenda but carried it to successful outcome.

Alternative agenda building strategies obviously exist. Nevertheless, as Table IV indicates, some commissions are high performers and other low performers irrespective of strategy. This phenomenon can be productively explored by juxtaposing the Commissions representing the highest and lowest performance on the issue conversion dimension. Table V reveals the activist agenda, coupled with Commission ranking of activist issues for the high and low performers.

Table V

Priority Issues* for Activist, with CSW Ranking

Dodge County		Altona	
Top Activist Issues	CSW Rank	Top Activist Issues	CSW Rank
ERA	1	Employment	5
Rape	9	Health	1
Family Planning	18	Ethnic-Minority	8
Sexual Preference	20	Rape	7
Female Offenders	6	Education & Training	16
Battered Women	7	Child Care	2
Abortion	19	Abortion	6
Ethnic-Minority	5	Battered Women	3.5

* The top 1/3 activist issues constitute this priority list. Eight rather than seven issues are indicated because of the scoring ties in the Dodge County activist group.

As might be expected issue orderings between activists and CSW members do not mesh perfectly--even in Altona, where the conversion score is highest. But this table of issue priorities does reveal that Altona gives high agenda status to virtually all of the issues most salient to the activist community. The only exception in this case is the matter of education and training. Dodge County, on the other hand, where we have found the lowest correlation between activist and CSW issue agenda, a comparison of the top activist issues with CSW rankings illuminates the low relationship. Half of the issues receiving high status on the activist agenda do not appear among the top eight CSW issues; and, in fact, three of those highest priority issues from the activist perspective rank at the very bottom of the women's agenda as articulated by the CSW.

What is interesting at first glance about the apparent variation is its challenge to a number of common preconceptions about the relationship between commission attributes and performance. Five context characteristics were initially posited as sources of variation in agenda building capacity: organizational characteristics, resources, membership traits, governmental responsiveness and community background. Only the community background characteristics appeared related in any systematic way to the capacity of a Commission to carry out the agenda building function in the five communities studied. In other words it made little difference whether a Commission is established by legislation or merely executive order, whether it had virtually no funding or was very well funded, whether government decision makers acted affirmatively on the agenda the CSW institutionalized or failed to do so. Rather the key factor related to the capacity of a CSW to play this "conversion of issues" role was

the community background variable: what was the initial structure of support for the CSW and did that support structure endure over time? Descriptions of community background traits of the high and low performers according to this agenda conversion criterion illustrate the point.

Dodge County: Origin of the Commission on the Status of Women

In January of 1971 the Board of County Commissioners enacted an ordinance establishing a Commission on the Status of Women. During the election campaign of 1970 a Dodge County citizen, who was identified locally and nationally as a feminist activist, approached all of the candidates for mayor and asked if they would appoint a mayor's CSW. One candidate agreed; and on the night of his election, the feminist protagonist sent him a telegram requesting that the CSW establishment proposal be placed on the agenda of the first council meeting. After hearings where pro and forces testified, the council drafted and acted upon an ordinance establishing the Commission.

While the original members appointed to the Commission were on the whole a distinguished group of citizens, they approached women's issues from at least three distinct perspectives. A few of the original members were women who had opposed the creation of the CSW and avowedly saw their function as negating women's movement objectives. Still others were not ideologically opposed to CSW objectives, but needed to be persuaded that a "problem" existed. A core group of ideologically committed feminists constituted a third element on this charter commission. Distributed across all three groups were a number of women harboring larger political ambitions of their own.

A struggle among the three major groups dominated the early history of the Commission, the ultimate impact of which disenchanted those women most closely tied to the women's movement. Rather than requesting reappointment to the Commission, or at least sponsoring like-minded women for membership, many feminist activists seem to have forsaken the commission entirely. One former commission member, interviewed because of her leadership role in a major feminist organization explained:

> "The activists have moved on . . . [because they] recognized it [the commission] would never be fully effective. . . . . They [the commission members] are much less activist now. It's more comfortable that way. It's more difficult to confront. Most women don't want to."

Those originally opposed to the establishment of the CSW also became inactive. This left, for the most part, women who required some consciousness raising to understand women's movement issues. Predictably such women do not successfully articulate the women's agenda inside government.

Altona: Origins of the Commission on the Status of Women

In 1974, during the fall elections, the Women's Political Caucus organized a coalition effort among women's groups aimed at selecting women to run for city council. When talking in the spring about what the coalition wanted newly elected women officials to address, it focused on appointment of women to boards and commissions. Accordingly this same group that had worked on the fall elections canvassed openings on boards and commissions in order to secure several

female appointments. Stemming from the Women's Political Caucus, but acting now as a separate entity, the group soon felt the need for some structure of its own. One participant in the early meetings reported, "We decided, 'we can't operate this way. We need some kind of formal structure . . . a Commission on the Status of Women should really be doing this.'" But the group realized that, if there were to be a CSW, it would have a broader charge than merely advancing female appointments.

When they reflected on what they wanted a CSW to do, one participant reported, they thought in terms of that which the Women's Political Caucus could not easily do. They specifically had in mind what they considered peripherally political functions, such as monitoring health care standards in the ob/gyn clinic at the local hospital.

Having worked out this rationale on their own, a committee of five women asked the mayor for an ordinance, and he agreed. Because the rationale for a Commission had been so thoroughly thought out in advance, and the persons involved at the early stages so well identified, it was natural that these people should receive Commission appointments. One member of the original coalition, a Women's Political Caucus activist, had done research on other local Commissions; and she assumed the lead. The dissension characterizing the early days of many CSW never appeared. The Commission became the official arm of the women's movement in the city, and every appointee had substantial feminist credentials.

Whether this linkage with the activist community will be maintained is unclear at this point. A comment made by one activist leader introduces some doubt. She reports that in making recommendations for boards and commissions she no longer thinks of the CSW as a high priority appointment. Instead, she is beginning to put her time into boards and commissions with greater clout in the city. Should such a trend develop, the agenda building capacity of this CSW would surely suffer. What comes through in this discussion of the community background of the Commissions exhibiting the greatest and least capacity for converting issues from the systemic to the institutional agenda, is that variation in this performance is closely related to the sources and structure of commission support from birth on.

The rationale supporting this thesis is that issue relevant ties between the Commission and the women's activist groups in the community are essential to high performance in the agenda conversion area; and that in order for community activist group leaders and commissions to maintain ties, they must clearly perceive their interdependence. What determines whether or not they will perceive interdependence is not simply the amount of formal overlap in membership, though that may be an indicator; nor is it the self-perceived activism in the women's movement on the part of the commissions that impacts on commission performance.[24] Rather what counts is the extent to which the community activist leaders perceive the commission role clearly in terms of some real task that needs to be done and that an official governmental advisory commission can do best. While hypothetically this legitimacy could be attained by a Commission after establishment, in the high and low performing Commissions used to exemplify the point here, the community background factors seemed to greatly influence the outcome.

Put in a broader context, these "sources and structure of support" characteristics touch on the matter of legitimacy. James Q. Wilson, in his work on political organization stresses that many organizations fail to become invested with the cloak of legitimate authority. Some of these organizations simply dissolve, while others endure only at the price of continuous factionalism or ineffectual blandness.[25] Legitimacy is not, however, a dichotomous variable. Organizations can be more or less invested with the principle of legitimate authority. The analysis of the origins of the two commissions described leads to the conclusion that to close the gap between the systemic and institutional agenda, the activist community must recognize the legitimacy of authority vested in the commission.

A MICRO PERSPECTIVE: ISSUES COMMISSIONS ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN SHUN

A somewhat different view of this agenda conversion question is achieved through examining the pooled responses of activists and commissioners for all five commissions studied. From an agenda building perspective one might ask: are there issues which the commissions as a group are likely to shun? In an earlier section we highlighted the substantial variation in frequency with which issues gain the docket across the set of commissions surveyed in 1975. Focusing now on these five notably "successful" commissions affords the opportunity for examination of infrequent placement in greater detail. Table VI exhibits those issues for which statistically significant negative relationships existed between responses from activists and CSW members, treating each as a single group.

Table VI

Issues Eliciting Significantly Different Responses from Commissions and Activists: Difference of Means Test

T Test Scores	Issues	
	Abortion	Sexual Preference
T. Value	-2.30	-4.84
*Significance	.02	.00

*Probability that T Value could occur by chance; .02 used as maximum significance score.

Table VI suggests that the placement of abortion and sexual preference on the activist agenda is significantly different from their placement on the CSW agenda, with activists rating these issues as significantly more "important."[26] How do activists interpret this difference?

It is fair to say that for the most part the activists interviewed responded to the commission treatment of both issues with tolerance and some occasionally with understanding. In two of the communities local hospitals refused to perform abortions, obviously constraining access to such operations. Local activists accepted the decision of the commissions to eschew a stand on this problem. One League of Women Voters member, though personally alarmed by hospital policy, seemed resigned to the fact that the commission's hands were tied on this matter. She explained that the local Commission on the Status of Women simply could not touch the issue, in part because of the internal dissension it would spark, but more especially because of the anti-abortion disposition of the chief executive official to whom the commission reports. Her assessment matched precisely that of the CSW leadership in the community. In a second community a pro-choice activist issued this blanket statement: "The most controversial issues are in the area of reproduction, and they for the most part have been left to NOW." This kind of division of labor seemed to her an acceptable compromise with political reality. Other activists in each of these communities saw the abortion restrictions as a major concern of Planned Parenthood. Since the CSW involvement seemed to add only incrementally to the pro-choice effort, the risk entailed in becoming active on this issue seemed too great.

It is important to remember, however, that these interviews were conducted before the June, 1977 Supreme Court decision upholding the right of a state to refuse to spend public funds for elective abortions. If the activists, responding in this understanding way to the CSW issue priorities, saw Commission support as essential to getting the abortion access issue on the local agenda, they might not have been so understanding. In other words, it may have been that since the Supreme Court decision in Roe vs. Wade and Doe vs. Bolton (1973) legitimized the abortion debate, the incremental benefit derived from CSW involvement was not worth risking overall CSW effectiveness, in activist eyes. With the pro-choice once again on the defensive, since the Beal vs. Doe/Maher vs. Roe decision (1977), commission treatment of this issue may become less acceptable.

The sexual preference issue is somewhat more complicated than the abortion matter. Here again we have higher agenda status assigned to sexual preference by the activist community than by the CSW. Three commissions studied had confronted sexual preference more or less directly and decided, for a variety of reasons that sexual preference would not be a commission issue. Unlike the case of abortion access, there was no alternative organization in any of these three communities ready and willing to champion the cause of lesbian rights. Given the possibility, as noted above, of a changed activist assessment of the CSW responsibilities in light of the recent Supreme Court decision on federal support for abortion, one might expect that, especially in the three communities where lesbian rights is an important but unlegitimated issue, the activists most concerned would be intolerant of CSW blinders. Surprisingly this expectation is not borne out.

Since the commission might have facilitated the movement of the lesbian rights question to the institutional agenda, why did the lesbian community itself let it "off the hook"? This question elicited two general types of responses. Activist respondents in two communities explained this phenomenon primarily in terms of the political ideology and the accompanying change strategy

of the lesbian community. In three of the communities the explanation resided more in the organizational characteristics of the lesbian community itself.

In both Altona and St. George political ideology emerged in several forms to produce the apparent complacency with the commission position. Some gay women held a separatist orientation and strove to maintain as little contact as possible with institutions, like CSW, which work with and depend upon, male governmental officials. Political ideology also short circuited interaction with the Commission on the Status of Women where the lesbian community was primarily libertarian. Some lesbians, who may or may not have been separatists, were politically estranged from government in any form, including the CSW form. As well ideology played a role in shaping lesbian interaction with the local CSW where that ideology defined the lesbian problem as essentially a gay rights problem. Finally, some lesbian activists perceive themselves to be relatively well accepted in the "straight" feminist community. As political pragmatists who believe that reducing the effectiveness of the commission generally (by decreasing its legitimacy through identification with lesbian interests) would be counter to the feminist interest of lesbians, they opt for working with the CSW on feminist issues, while fighting the lesbian battle under a separate banner.

In three communities, Onega, Dodge and Marysville, political ideology shed little light on the accommodating character of the lesbian-CSW relationship. In these communities, where lesbian groups are much less visible and less highly differentiated, lesbian tolerance revolved around the organization of the lesbian community itself. Three salient aspects of the lesbian organization emerged from the interviews. First many gay women, even those active in lesbian organizations, were non-political. Hence they did not consider the failure of the local Commission on the Status of Women to take up the matter of lesbian rights as any particular deprivation. Second, among those lesbians who did think in political terms, insufficient group agreement on the rules of the game, stemming apparently from great diversity in the lesbian community,[27] militated against any kind of goal formation. Obviously the development of some consensus on basic style and leadership questions must precede any effort to make demands on a government body such as a Commission on the Status of Women. Finally, some of those who were active in lesbian groups remained timid about making demands on a governmental body when existing state law prohibited their very lifestyle. Understandably some gay women simply lacked the security necessary to come out of the political closet.

In the three communities where these attributes of the lesbian organization seemed to explain the absence of demands on the commission, it also appeared that such agenda demands, if articulated, would be difficult for the CSW to meet. Even if one were to assume that the total commission, or at least a substantial majority could be persuaded of the wisdom of such a cause (unlikely because of strong religious affiliation of some members), the innate drive for organizational survival might lead the commission decision makers to steer away from such action. For some time organizational theorists have been telling us that whatever else organizations do, they seek to survive.[28] There is little to suggest that Commissions on the Status of Women would be the exception to this rule, or that most of them could embrace the sexual preference issue and survive.

Still in the other two communities the issue of lesbian rights may have been raised without the threat of such heavy sanction. That the CSW failed to raise these issues reflects in some significant measure characteristics of the lesbian community. To be sure a local CSW would not try to place such an issue on the official docket absent strong advocacy from the lesbian community itself.

A MICRO PERSPECTIVE:

COMMISSIONS ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN AS INITIATORS OF AGENDA ITEMS

Typically, discussions of agenda-building focus on the facility with which an institution translates the systemic agenda item into one enjoying a spot on the institutional docket. However, Cobb and Elder note that it is possible for an issue to gain access to the formal agenda without having gained systemic agenda standing first.[29] Thus, in theory, a Commission on the Status of Women can depart from the broker role and actively initiate issues not visible on the systemic agenda in the community. Full examination of the agenda-building role Commissions play demands some attention be paid to this initiating activity.

In the five Commissions studied, this variation on agenda-building seemed to occur via two different routes. In the first instance, it occurred when an individual CSW member had a sensitizing experience of some kind, not yet experienced generally even in the feminist community. Sexism in the public schools provided a catalyst for action on the part of Commission members in at least two communities. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 had prohibited sex discrimination in public education and mandated action by school systems in many program areas. In both Marysville and Onega, Commission on the Status of Women members, who were also mothers of daughters in the public schools, spearheaded CSW involvement in Title IX advocacy after their daughters had been denied participation in male-dominated athletic programs. In each case, at least some activists in the community cited Title IX as one issue "created" locally by the CSW, and a review of CSW minutes and interviews with other CSW members bore out this judgment.

The second route that Commissions seemingly follow in taking up this initiator role is illustrated by the Dodge CSW involvement in the Status of Women Offenders issue. In Dodge this issue gained formal agenda status again without benefit of activist community concern. In contrast to the Title IX illustration, this latter issue was promoted by the CSW staff rather than the Commissioners, and interviews with staff members revealed that the precipitating event was a request from the regional office of the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau for local action in this area. In the activist community, however, the Women's Bureau catalyst did not appear to be highly visible. Many activists volunteered their opinion that this was an issue brought to public attention by the Commission on the Status of Women. But in reality the Commission on the Status of Women emerges again in this case as a kind of broker, not between activist community and elected officials as in the typical case, but rather between the Women's Bureau, which is operating with a national agenda, and local officials not yet cognizant of some items on that national agenda.

Earlier in this essay we characterized two approaches to agenda-setting described in the literature as being first, the "let-it-happen" approach, and second, the "encourage-it-to-happen" approach. These final cases of agenda-building activity illustrate still a third approach, dubbed "making-it-happen." In this third approach the Commission on the Status of Women plays an active role in defining problems and setting goals at the local level.[30] While in the general case we would agree that "because of the inertia present in any system, institutional agendas will always lag to some extent behind the more general systemic agenda,"[31] clearly this generalization calls for some modification. While a CSW may be responding to a national systemic agenda in taking up certain items for placement on the local institutional agenda, it is doing so in what may be a near-vacuum as far as the local systemic agenda goes. In so doing, the CSW is not lagging behind, but rather is building an issue into the institutional and systemic agendas simultaneously at the community level.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues that agenda-building theory provides a useful framework for the analysis of women and local politics and, more specifically, for the study of local Commissions on the Status of Women. In conclusion, we are left with some answers and some new questions.

Through taking up this agenda-building lens, we have seen that Commissions on the Status of Women adopt issues in a predictable fashion. The survey of 48 Commissions revealed that Commissions generally stress a few issues with broad appeal and that they tend to adopt clusters of less generally attractive issues, thus enhancing the possibility of agenda placement for any one issue in the cluster. Yet the basis for these clusters in terms of the relative importance of the substantive issue similarity versus conditions operative in the context within which the agenda is set remains a topic for future study.

In studying five "successful" Commissions in depth, it appears that even here Commissions vary greatly in agenda-building capacity. The durability and nature of the initial structure of support for the CSW seemed most useful in interpreting the variation in agenda-building capacity of the strongest and weakest agenda-builders in the five-community study. The power of this structure of support variable can only be determined finally through examination of a significantly larger number of cases.

The micro-level study also suggested that there are issues CSW may systematically screen out: abortion and sexual preference in the five communities studied. Yet in neither case did the activist community judge the Commission harshly for making what was perceived by some to be an omission necessary for survival. Again, however, study of a larger number of cases, preferably over a period of several years, would provide greater insight into the multiple unexplored dimensions of this issue-shunning phenomenon.

Finally, we have found that in some instances Commissions do not simply respond to issues on the systemic agenda of the local community, but will act as a local initiator--actually building a systemic agenda by placing items on the CSW agenda. In the five-community study this tended to occur where federal level action of some kind had taken place to legitimate the issue on a national women's agenda and/or where a CSW member had a sensitizing experience of some

kind. Whether these factors are just two of many conditions under which Commissions become initiators of local agenda items remains also to be examined in future research.

Though every conclusion seems to stimulate yet another question, answers to these questions promise to provide deeper insight into local level agenda building in the women's policy sphere. Following such questions leads us one step further toward understanding the core of politics outlined by Schattschneider when he highlighted the relationship between the definition of alternatives, the choice of conflicts and the allocation of power.

Appendix A

Question Probing Importance of Agenda Items in the 5 Commission Study

Here is a list of substantive issue areas which might be of special concern to women. (Hand card with substantive activity area list). Using this scale, how important would you say each of these issues is in your county/city. (Hand card with importance scale).

*SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE AREAS

Education and Training
Employment
Child Care
Health Care
Political Participation of Women
Credit
Insurance
Tax Law
Housing
Rape
ERA
Family Planning
Female Offenders
Abortion
Sexual Preference
Battered Women
Self assertiveness/ psychology of women
Consciousness raising in Media
Ethnic Minority Issues
Legal Rights in Marriage and Family
Other

IMPORTANCE SCALE

5 of absolutely top importance
4 of great importance
3 of moderate importance
2 of little importance
1 of no importance
0 don't know/can't say

*This list of substantive policy issues was drawn primarily from the national women's agenda. The eleven items and 75 sub-items appearing on that agenda were melded into a list of twenty substantive issues and put in terms commonly identifiable across communities studies.

Appendix B

Selection of Women's Activist Organization Leaders in the Five Commission Study

In identifying the relevant "interest" organizations whose priorities reflect the systemic women's agenda, preliminary conceptual problems revolve around the need to distinguish among interest groups, social movements, and movement organizations. The literature defines an interest group as "an organized social aggregation which seeks political goals it is incapable of providing for itself."[1] It is to be distinguished from a social movement in which interest groups or pressure groups may take part, but which itself represents "a generalized progression of public opinion" untied to a specific organization.[2]

While the "women's movement" is a term often used in the discussion of activities of organized women's interest groups, Jo Freeman has correctly pointed out the distinction between the women's movement and organized activist groups.[3] Within the women's movement there are organizations, such as the National Organization for Women, which owe their existence to the movement in a very direct sense. But in addition to these organizations, which are part of the very texture of the new feminism, there are also other kinds of voluntary organizations that hold the advancement of women's interests as a primary objective. In local politics especially, these organizations become part of the pressure system advancing movement objectives. At the nominal level, then, any organization could qualify as a women's activist organization if it were visibly change oriented,[4] and if the advocated change aimed to advance women's movement values. To qualify as a women's activist group, the organization would not have to be an ideologically feminist group.

The initial design called for interviewing the National Organization for Women and League of Women Voters chairpersons in each community. It was taken for granted that the League of Women Voters, because of its historical connection with the first women's movement, its documented liberal bias, but most especially because of its recent national emphasis on ERA ratification, would emerge in every community as one of the most visible and influential women's activist organizations. It was also assumed that the prototypical women's movement organization, National Organization for Women (NOW), though less well organized at the local level, would be a key actor in formulating the feminist component of the systemic agenda. These preliminary judgments about the local organizational map generally proved sound, with the single exception

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[1]L. Harmon Ziegler and G. Wayne Peak, Interest Groups in American Society (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 3.

[2]For a distinction between terms developed, see A. Paul Pross (ed.)., Pressure Group Behavior in Canadian Politics (Scarborough, Ont., Canada: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1975), p. 2.

[3]Jo Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and its Relation to the Policy Process (New York: David McKay Co.,Inc., 1975), pp. 71-72.

[4]Frank X. Steggert, Community Action Groups and City Government: Perspectives from Ten American Cities (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1975), p. 28.

that NOW did not function in one community. The Women's Political Caucus has emerged in that community to represent the feminist viewpoint locally.

The choice of the League of Women Voters and National Organization for Women (and the Women's Political Caucus in one case) drew additional support from responses to a question asking commission leadership and staff to name the most visible and/or effective women's activist groups in the community. This question elicited, in addition to the LWV, NOW, and the Women's Political Caucus (WPC), designation of a number of other groups. After the Commissioner and staff interviews I then asked the LWV and NOW (or WPC) chair the same question, thus providing a rounded perspective on the four or five organizations that were perceived to fit best the "women's activist group" designation in each community. Other groups mentioned included Business and Professional Women, AAUW, Women's Centers, Welfare Organizations, Junior League, Ethnic Women's Organizations, Black Sororities, Lesbian Organizations, Collectives for Third World Women, Peer Counselling Collectives and a women employee's association. Predictably the set of four or five groups varied across communities, with the LWV and NOW (with the exception noted) remaining constant.

Extensive interviews of the formal leaders of these organizations revealed the women's systemic agenda in each community. During the course of each interview activists assessed the importance (scale 1 to 5) of the twenty major women's policy issues (see appendix A). These data resulted in a measure of community activist priorities, which provided a basis for comparing the systemic agenda to the institutional agenda articulated by the CWS.

Footnotes

[1]E. E. Schattschneider, The Semi-Sovereign People (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 68. Emphasis mine.

[2]For women's political participation at mass level see Jo Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation (New York: David McKay, 1975) and Kirsten Amundson, A New Look at the Silenced Majority (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1976). For research on female elites see Jeane Kirkpatrick, Political Women (New York: Basic Books, 1977), Irene Diamond, Sex Roles in the State House (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), Women in the Courts (National Center for State Courts, 1978).

[3]See Susan Mezey, "Women Politicians and Women's Issues: The Case of Hawaii," paper presented at the American Political Science Association Convention, Chicago, Illinois, September 2-5, 1976; and Susan Mezey, "Local Representatives in Connecticut: Sex Differences in Attitudes Towards Women's Rights Policy," paper presented at the American Political Science Association Convention, Washington, D.C., September 1-4, 1977.

[4]See Martin Gruberg, Women in American Politics (Oshkosh, Wisconsin: Academic Press, 1968). Since 1973 the LWV has been working for ratification of the ERA and during the 1978 convention considered adopting abortion rights as an issue. Thus there are indications of movement in the organization toward a stronger commitment to a "women's agenda."

[5]Layne D. Hoppe, "Agenda-Setting Strategies: Pollution Policy" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 1969), p. 2, cited in Charles O. Jones, An Introduction to the Study of Public Policy (2nd ed.; Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1977) p. 39.

[6]Roger W. Cobb and Charles D. Elder, Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda-Building (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), p. 10.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Matthew Crenson, The Un-Politics of Air Pollution (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 172.

[9]Jack L. Walker, "Setting the Agenda in the U.S. Senate: A Theory of Problem Selection," British Journal of Political Science, VII, No. 4 (October, 1977), 423-445.

[10]Cobband Elder, Participation in American Politics, p. 44.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 10.

[13]For a clear discussion of the relationship between bias and agenda setting see Jones, An Introduction to the Study of Public Policy, p. 38.

[14]Walker has developed a typology of Senate agenda items based on the routineness of their occurrence, with the most routine being the periodically recurring problems and the non-routine being chosen problems. Walker labels these latter types of issues discretionary agenda items. The CSW agenda is primarily a discretionary agenda. Indeed, some issues that gain placement, such as education, are recurring in a general programmatic sense; but, the particular aspect of education addressed in the CSW agenda item is typically non-recurring. Limited access to athletic programming for high school women is a discretionary issue on which a commission will focus for a year, or two or even three, but with the explicit intent of resolving the problem so that it will not be recurring. For typology see Walker, "Setting the Agenda," p. 424.

[15]Cobb and Elder represent this "recognition of issues" perspective on agenda building; see Cobb and Elder, Participation in American Politics, p. 152.

[16]Cobb and Elder, Participation in American Politics, p. 93.

[17]For a discussion of many "private" issues taken as given but actually reflecting public policy see Alvin Schorr, "Family Values and Public Policy" Journal of Social Policy, I, No. 1, p. 39.

[18]For an in depth discussion of the significance of the balance factor on Commissions on the Status of Women see Debra W. Stewart, "Local Commissions on the Status of Women: An Examination of their Representative Function," paper prepared for delivery at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Ill., April 20-22, 1978.

[19]Non-governmental Commissions on the Status of Women were not included in this study because of the variety of shapes and forms they assume. Four such local commissions were registered with the Women's Bureau in 1973-1974. Undoubtedly many more operate in communities across the country.

[20]Cobb and Elder, Participation in American Politics, p. 110.

[21]Cobb and Elder present four more specific propositions linking issue characteristics to issue expansion. Examination of these additional propositions are not possible with the data analyzed here. Greater knowledge of the community context in which the issue emerged would be required; see Cobb and Elder, Participation in American Politics, pp. 112-124.

[22]Broad support for some degree of equal treatment in employment has been operative for many years. A Gallup poll reported in 1954 that a solid majority of the population supported equal pay for working women. National legislation passed in the sixties and seventies, prohibiting race/sex discrimination in employment and education, further legitimized these issues. By 1976 a Gallup poll reported 68% of those interviewed in a national sample approved of working wives. Equal treatment in education and employment is fundamental to achievement in the work role. Even working class women, oft thought estranged from the women's movement, are reported to be attracted to the equal rights in employment and education aspects of the movement ideology. (K. McCourt, Working Class Women and Grass-Roots Politics, Indiana: 1977; M. L. Carden, The New Feminist Movement, Russell Sage: 1974).

[23]Jack L. Walker, "Setting the Agenda...," p. 445.

[24]It is interesting to note that the self-perception of commission members concerning their own degree of activism in the women's movement bears no relationship to the extent to which that commission actually represents the systemic women's agenda of the larger community. Table N12 reports mean activism scores for the Commissions with their respective ranking on the agenda building performance criterion.

Table N12

CSW by Activism* of Members and Agenda Building Performance Rating

Commission	Mean Activism	Agenda Performance Rating
St. George (n=8)	7.8	3
Dodge County (n=20)	7.7	5
Altona (n=12)	7.6	1
Onega (n=32)	6.9	2
Marysville County (n=13)	6.7	4

* on a 1 to 10 scale

[25]James Q. Wilson, Political Organizations (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 221.

[26]The placement of "ethnic minority issues" by activists also appeared significantly different from placement by the CSW. However in this case the interviews revealed a clearly different interpretation of the content of the issue in each group. CSW members simply rejected "breaking it down that way,: and some indicated that ethnic and minority concerns shaped their interest in all of the other issues. Because of this different interpretation is not clear that the statistically significant different represents a real difference; thus the ethnic minority issue is dropped as a case of CSW-activities divergence and does not appear in Table VI.

[27]Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, Lesbian/Women (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1972), p. 7.

[28]For a summary of this literature, see Wilson, Political Organizations, P. 10 ff.

[29]Cobb and Elder, Participation in American Politics, p. 161.

[30]In Jones' words the "making it happen" option characterizes the case where government plays an active role in defining problems and setting goals. Officials do not wait for demands to emerge but rather set the agenda for action; see Jones, An Introduction to the Study of Public Policy, p. 38.

[31]Cobb and Elder, Participation in American Politics, p. 14.